

Applicant Name Meagher County Conservation District (MCCD)
Project Name Hydrologic Investigation of the Smith River Watershed

Project Abstract

This project is an investigation of the groundwater and surface water interaction within the Upper Smith River watershed, a tributary of the Missouri River. The Smith River is an important recreational and agricultural area, located in Meagher and Cascade counties in west-central Montana. Irrigation is the cornerstone of this area's agricultural and economic well-being. Tourism is also important to the economy of the area and the State of Montana, with thousands of visitors traveling to the area annually to float and fish the nationally renowned Smith River.

The MCCD has local responsibility to assess the local natural resources and to oversee their proper management. The MCCD believes strongly that these decisions should be based on scientific information, not perception and/or emotion. The information from this hydrologic investigation is necessary to determine and predict the cumulative impacts that changes from wild flood irrigation to sprinkler irrigation and other water uses will have on the hydrologic system in the Upper Smith River watershed. The investigation will also determine if the use of groundwater for sprinkler irrigation is resulting in reduced flow in the Smith River. The MCCD will carry out this project through a partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

This project would result in increased understanding of the overall hydrologic system. It will help state and federal agencies, along with the concerned public, to better understand the interaction of ground-water/surface water, an important component when determining allocation of water in the area. The ability to determine if groundwater is or is not "immediately or directly connected" to surface water is a critical component when determining the allocation of water by Montana law.

Information from this study will enhance the conservation, proper management, and development and/or preservation of our limited water resource. The information from this study will benefit agriculture, fish and wildlife habitat, associated outdoor-based recreation, and health and human safety.